

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-16

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CIEP-03 COME-00 DODE-00 EB-11 FPC-01 H-03 INR-11

INT-08 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 OMB-01 PM-07 RSC-01 SAM-01

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SUBJECT: POWER RATIONING IN WEST BENGAL

FOLLOWING SENT ACTION NEW DELHI FROM CALCUTTA AUG 23 REPEATED:

QUOTE

CALCUTTA 1736

1. MUCH TO THE SURPRISE OF A SKEPTICAL PUBLIC, THE GOWB INTRODUCED ON AUGUST 12, 1974 A STRINGENT POWER RATIONING PROGRAM DESIGNED PRIMARILY TO AMELIORATE THE EFFECTS OF MASSIVE AND UNSCHEDULED LOAD SHEDDING IN THE INDUSTRIAL SECTORS. LOAD SHEDDING IN WEST BENGAL HAD REACHED THE POINT WHERE NUMEROUS INDUSTRIES WERE THREATENING TO CLOSE AND THE PRODUCTION OF INDIA'S PREMIER FOREIGN EXCHANGE EARNER, JUTE, WAS SEVERELY AFFECTED. THE POWER RATIONING PROGRAM, EFFECTIVE UNTIL OCTOBER 31, 1974 WAS INTRODUCED UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF THE DEFENSE OF INDIA RULES. THE GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO ENFORCE THE RATIONING PROGRAM WAS HIGHLIGHTED BY ITS ANNOUN-
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CEMENT THAT IT WOULD PENALIZE THOSE POWER GENERATING

AGENCIES' EXECUTIVES WHO FAIL TO GENERATE ADEQUATE POWER, AND BY THE DEPUTATION OF A FORCE OF INSPECTORS WHO WOULD ENSURE ADHERENCE TO THE RESTRICTIONS ON THE PART OF CONSUMERS.

2. ASPECTS OF THE PROPOSAL INCLUDE: (A) TWENTY PERCENT POWER CUT FOR ALL INDUSTRIES; (B) 33.1/3 PERCENT VOLUNTARY REDUCTION IN POWER CONSUMPTION OF COMMERCIAL FIRMS AND BANKS DRAWING MORE THAN 100 UNITS: (1:) CLOSURE OF SHOPS AT 7:30 PM ON WORKDAYS AND AT 8:30 PM ON SATURDAYS AND SUNDAYS; (D) NO OPERAION OF MEDIUM AND LOW VOLTAGE INDUSTRIES OR OF FARM ANDHOUSEHOLD ELECTRICAL APPLIANCES, INCLUDING PUMPS, FROM 5:00 PM TO 10:00 PM; (E) NO OPERATION OF ROOM AIRCOOLERS AND AIRCONDITIONERS IN COMMERCIAL FIRMS, BANKS AND HOMES FROM 7:00 AM TO 9:30 AM AND 5:00 PM TO 10:00 PM; (F) ALL FUTURE LOAD SHEDDINGS WILL BE WITH PRIOR NOTIFICATITN; (G) NO NEON,MERCUTY AND OTHER DECORATIVE LIGHTING ILLUMINATIONS FOR CEREMONIES AND ADVERTISEMENTS;(H) COMPULSORY CLOSURE OF ALL AIRCONDITIONED RESTAURANTS, BARS AND OTHER AMUSEMENT CENTERS FOR ONE DAY A WEEK; (I) MEDICINE, GROCERY, TOBACCO, ICE,REFRESHMENT AND SIMILAR RETAIL SHOPS, VITAL GOVERNMENT ESTABLISHMENTS, MAJOR STEEL PLANTS, COAL MINES, DURGAPUR FERTILIZER AND CHEMICAL PLANTS, ANTIBIOTIC AND HARMONE MANUFACTURING PLANTS, THEATERS, HOSPITALS PUBLIC UTILITIES, DAIRIES, STREET LIGHTING AND OTHER ESSENTIAL SERVICES ALL ARE EXEMPTED FROM POWER RATIONING PURVIEW.

3. INDUSTRIALISTS, ALTHOUGH SKEPTICAL THAT THE GENERATING AGENCIES COULD MAINTAIN THE MINIMUM REQUIREMENT (430 MW) FOR EFFECTIVE RATIONING, HAVE WELCOMED THE MEASURE AND APPARENTLY ARE ABIDING FULLY BY ITS GUIDELINES. AMONG THE MEASURES INTRODUCED BY INDUSTRIALISTS TO COPE WITH THE RESTRICTIONS ARE STAGGERED WORK SHIFTS AND A FIVE DAY WORK WEEK.

4. DESPITE AN INAUSPICIOUS START (RECORD LOAD SHEDDING OCCURED ON THE INITIAL DAY OF RATIONING) THE POWER RATIONING PROGRAM HAS AT A MINIMUN, CONTRIBUTED TO A VIRTUAL ERADICATION OF LOAD SHEDDING. IT IS NOT CLEAR WHETHER THIS IS A RESULT OF INCREASED POWER GENERATION OR EFFECTIVE RATIONING. COMMENT: POWER RATIONING HAS NOT BEEN WITHOUT ITS OPPO- NENTS. UNIONS, INCLUDING CONGRESS' INTUC, HAVEBEEN VOCIFERIOUS IN THEIR OPPOSITION LARGELY BECAUSE AN EFFECTIVE POWER UNCLASSIFIED

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RATIONING PROGRAM WOULD RESULT IN A REDUCTION OF THE OVERTIME MADE NECESSARY BY LOAD SHEDDING WITH A CORRESPONDING CUT IN PAY. GOWB STATE MINISTERS HAVE TOLD US THAT THE RECORD LOAD SHEDDING ON AUGUST 12 WAS THE RESULT OF SABOTAGE BY THE CPI'S AITUC AT GENERATING STATIONS AND THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD INVESTIGATE AND ACT ON THIS BASIS.

5. DISCUSSIONS WITH VARIOUS JUTE, ENGINEERING AND OTHER INDUSTRIALISTS LEAD US TO BELIEVE THAT THE POWER RATIONING

PROGRAM IS HIGHLY EFFECTIVE. THE JUTE COMMISSION, FOR EXAMPLE,
BELIEVES IT POSSIBLE THAT WITH EFFECTIVE RATIONING THE
INDUSTRY CAN APPROACH 90 PERCENT CAPACITY UTILIZATION; AND OTHER
WEST BENGAL INDUSTRIES ARE CONFIDENT OF SUBSTANTIAL INCREASE
IN THEIR PRODUCTION. ALTHOUGH CONTROVERSY REGARDING ACTUAL
PRODUCTION CAPABILITIES OF VARIOUS GENERATING AGENCIES
(PARTICULARLY THE BRITISH-OWNED CALCUTTA ELECTRIC SUPPLY CORPORATION)
REMAINS, THE RATIONING PROGRAM IS CLEARLY A
STOP GAP MEASURE DESIGNED TO BUY TIME UNTIL ADDITIONAL POWER
GENERATING CAPABILITY IS INSTALLED.
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